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ABSTRACT

This study investigated parents' perceptions of their child's reading abilities. Parents of 92 fourth grade students completed questionnaires to measure the perception parents held of their child's reading ability in relation to the ability of their child based on standardized test scores. Correlations between the Terra Nova Standardized Test and teacher's scores were analyzed in addition to correlations between parental rating and teacher grading. Results showed little correlation between the standardized test and teacher's scores and a strong correlation between parental rating and teacher grading. Furthermore, results showed that parents rate their children similarly in the high achievement category, showing slight differences in other categories. (Contains 25 references and 4 tables of data; appendixes contain a cover letter and the parent questionnaire.) (Author/RS)

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Parents' Perceptions of Children's Reading Abilities

By

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Abstract

This study investigated parents' perceptions of their child's reading abilities. Parents of 92 fourth grade students completed questionnaires to measure the perception parents held of their child's reading ability in relation to the ability of their child based on standardized test scores. Correlations between the Terra Nova Standardized Test and teacher's scores were analyzed in addition to correlations between parental rating and teacher grading. Results showed little correlation between the standardized test and student's scores and a strong correlation between parental rating and teacher grading. Furthermore, results showed that parents rate their children similarly in the high achievement category, showing slight differences in other categories.

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A review of the literature suggests that parents perceive reading as a mostly feminine activity. Average scores for females are higher in reading and writing, whereas males demonstrate advantages in science and math (ETS, 1989). Parents perceive daughters as enjoying reading more than sons do and designate them with a higher degree of literacy competence (Shepston and Jenson, 1996). It is possible that parent's perceptions and expectations cause girls to become better readers than boys.

A study by Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski, Skovera (1996) was conducted to examine student perceptions about parent role models in the performance of reading tasks at home. Some factors have been proposed to explain the differences between boys and girls in reading performance including biological differences, the rate of maturation, teacher expectations, interest level of reading materials, and socio-cultural factors (Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski, Skovera, 1996). Johnson and Greenbaum (1980) report that biological differences do not completely explain the gender differences in reading proficiency. Maturation as a theory loses support as cross cultural studies show that girls do not perform better than boys in all cultures (Klein, 1977). Teachers influence the motivation for reading and perceptions coincide with report card grades, yet the perceptions did not divide based on gender (Sweet and Guthrie, 1994). Dwyer (1974) concludes that content as a reason for differing achievement goes without support after researching basal readers. Interest in gender differences heightens as one analyzes reading achievement in cross-cultural studies. The study focused on two areas; 1. Students view reading and writing as female activities, 2. Students belief as to which parent is more apt to participate in specific literacy activities.

The study concluded that children were influenced by socio-cultural expectations. This result is supported by the research of Mazurkiewicz (1960), Stein and Smithells (1969) and Shapiro (1990). In addition, the study found gender expectations to have a

greater impact on boys than on girls (Dwyer, 1974). The limited number of male role models in the home certainly influences the expectations of boys. Increasing the expectations for boys to succeed in literacy would undoubtedly perpetuate greater achievement.

A study conducted by Prawat and Jarvis (1980) explored the possibility that teacher perceptions of students in regards to reading achievement were gender biased. The discrepancy in reading achievement between boys and girls set the purpose for the study. The connection between sex, IQ, reading achievement, grade level, and teacher ratings were analyzed. The results of the study showed that teachers demonstrated a bias in rating boys as more aggressive than girls. However, the study also concluded that gender is not as influential as IQ and reading achievement in creating teacher perceptions of student ability (Prawat and Jarvis, 1980).

Clay's "Concepts About Print" (1993) was administered to seventy-nine children to assess differences among the print concept development of primary students. "Concepts About Print" is an indicator of behaviors that support reading acquisition. The assessment items uncover information regarding what children are attending to on the printed page. This assessment allows teachers to key in on those aspects of reading that are necessary to understand unknown concepts. According to a study conducted by Shepston and Jenson (1996), there was little difference in scores by gender for children in first or second grade. However, parents that completed a family literacy survey and responded to the item stating, "My child is a good reader," clearly indicated a difference in their perception of their child's reading ability. The survey question yielded a mean of 4.51 for sons and 4.77 for daughters indicating a lower perception of reading ability for boys. Results of this study show that by the second grade, parents are already stereotyping girls to be better readers than boys.

A study of gender differences in reading across the cultures conducted by Johnson

(1976) examined the effect of cultural expectations in shaping reading performance (Lehr, 1982). The study included subjects from second, fourth, and sixth grades in the four English-speaking countries of Canada, England, Nigeria, and the United States. The test included six components: 1.Vocabulary, 2.Comprehension, 3.Initial consonants, 4.Variant consonants, 5.Vowel sounds, and 6.Structural analysis. Results indicated that reading achievement of boys was dominant in England and Nigeria, while girls demonstrated higher achievement levels in Canada and the United States. It was noted that in North American countries, reading is considered to be a "feminine" activity by adults, whereas parents in Nigeria accentuate the importance of reading to well-educate their sons.

Furthermore, Japan's reading differences between boys and girls are almost indistinguishable and only 1% of children demonstrate reading problems (Sheridan, 1981). Japanese parents take an active role in the education of their children, particularly at the preschool level. Time is set aside each day for family reading, and data from book sales clearly indicates the importance of literature in the home. Consequently, Japanese children are prepared for reading at the age of 4 1/2. This study implies that reading achievement is related to cultural expectations.

The impact of societal influences and the structure of schools on reading proficiency was examined by Gross (1978). Orator's Hebrew Reading Comprehension Test was administered to second and fifth grade children living on an Israeli kibbutz. Gross selected this population due to its socialization system with an expectancy of males and females to work as equals and in which children are educated without the use of grades or tests, but instead participate in special tutoring as a means to educate each sex. The study showed no significant differences in reading performance between girls and boys (Lehr, 1982).

Conversely, a study of sex role standard and academic achievement found reading

achievement to be higher for boys who considered reading to be a masculine activity (Mazurkiewicz, 1960). The investigation included eleventh grade males to determine if the level of reading achievement might be related to attitudes developed by social or cultural environments. Subjects were asked to respond to a M-F Attitude Activity Inventory by classifying activities as feminine or masculine. Results indicate that the perception of reading as a feminine activity influences a boy's reading ability. In addition, the boy's attitude is to some degree related to his father's attitude, primarily when the student participates in vocational curriculum (Mazurkiewicz, 1960).

The discrepancy in reading achievement along gender lines has been established. Research has consistently concluded that females demonstrate higher levels of reading achievement than males. Several factors influencing such defining differences in performance have been evaluated and found to be insignificant contributors to the gender differences. One factor deserving further exploration is the influence of parent's perceptions of their child's reading abilities. The perception that parents have of reading as primarily a feminine activity may result in females having greater success in reading than males. Societal expectations for gender differences in regards to reading achievement may be the perpetuating factor that has created a distinct difference in reading ability amongst the two sexes.

Hypothesis

The aforementioned studies suggest that gender differences in reading performance are influenced by cultural perceptions. These perceptions are based more on gender than on actual performance as measured by standardized tests. In the current study, it was hypothesized that parents of boys perceive their son's reading ability to be lower than parents of girls perceive their daughters' reading ability to be.

Procedures

For the purpose of this study, the subjects consisted of the parents of 92 fourth grade students. Students were of diverse cultural backgrounds and of a working and middle class socioeconomic status. All students attended the same elementary school in a suburban community. Subjects were from four different classrooms within that school and consisted of 42 boys and 50 girls.

A questionnaire was designed to gather information from parents regarding their perceptions of their child's reading ability (See Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to measure the perception parents held of their child's reading ability in relation to the actual ability of their child based on standardized test scores. The results of the questionnaire were intended to measure parental gender bias in their child's reading ability. The study determined if the parents' perceptions correlated with actual performance. The questionnaire posed fifteen questions to identify how parents viewed their child's reading level and included several distracters pertaining to mathematics, homework, and reading interests. Each student was sent home with two surveys; one for each parent. A cover letter introduced the nature of the study, instructions for proper completion, and a deadline by which the survey was to be returned to school (See Appendix A).

The results of each individual survey were compared with student performance on the reading sections of the Terra Nova standardized test administered to them in third grade. The results were tabulated to show the gender of the parent, gender of the student, whether or not the parent perceived their child as excelling or having difficulty in reading, and the numerical grade the parent perceived his/her child to obtain most often on reading assignments and tests. Results were analyzed statistically for significant differences as well as the strength of the correlation between the parent's perception and the student's reading skill.

Results

Surveys were returned from 78 out of 92 fourth grade students. Terra Nova scores were not available for all students, however, information for 67 students was provided. Mothers and fathers were each given a survey to complete. A total of 135 surveys were completed and returned. A correlation between the standardized Terra Nova test results and teacher's scores were analyzed. Table 1 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and a .61 correlation between the two variables. Results indicate that only 36% of the time were the Terra Nova standardized test and teacher's scores in agreement in terms of levels of performance.

Table 1

Correlations Between the Terra Nova Standardized Test and Teachers' Scores

Sample	M	SD	r
Terra Nova	63.24	20.41	0.61
Teacher's Scores	88.76	13.85	

A correlation between parental rating and teacher grading was also analyzed. Table 2 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and a significant correlation of .95 between parents and teachers' ratings. The data indicates that 90.45% of the time, parents rate students similar to actual scholastic achievement. Prior to collecting the surveys from parents, an additional analysis of data comparing the responses of mothers and fathers was intended. Survey responses indicated that parents had completed the surveys together forfeiting any information that could have been obtained from studying parental gender differences in the perceptions of children's abilities.

Table 2

Correlations Between Parents' Ratings and Teachers' Scores

Sample	M	SD	r
Parents	85.51	19.83	0.95
Teachers	86.4	19.87	

Four survey questions were selected for analysis to provide additional information to the study.

What reading material is your child most likely to see you read at home?

Responses were almost identical along gender lines with most parents indicating that children would most likely see them read newspapers and be least likely to see them read information books.

My child is most likely to spend time at home reading...

Responses indicated a similarity in children being most likely to spend time reading recreational books. Few children were noted as spending time reading the newspapers, contrary to what their parents most often chose to read.

My child's favorite subject is...

Survey responses of parents indicated math as being the favorite subject of most children. Parents of boys indicated science was also a favored subject, whereas parents of girls chose reading as the next favored subject of their daughters. However, only 1% of boys selected reading as their favorite subject.

When it comes to attending school in general, my child's attitude is...

Survey results indicated that 89% of parents of boys and 90% of parents of girls felt their children hold a positive attitude towards school. A summary of specific survey results is presented in Table 3.

An analysis was done to determine gender differences in parents' perceptions of ability ratings. Parents of sons and parents of daughters rated their children as "A" students 52% and 54% of the time respectively. Parents of girls rated their daughters as "B" students 5% of the time more than parents of boys. Results indicate that parents rate their children similarly in the high achievement category. However, a greater percentage of boys' parents rate their sons to be in the "C" category than they do girls. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 3
Results of Parent Survey

What reading material is your child most likely to see you read at home?		Boys	Girls
	newspapers	35%	36%
	magazines	23%	26%
	info. books	04%	04%
	recreational books	15%	08%
	other	20%	23%
My child is most likely to spend time at home reading...		Boys	Girls
	newspapers	03%	0%
	magazines	31%	15%
	recreational books	48%	54%
	school texts	16%	20%
	other	01%	10%
My child's favorite subject is...		Boys	Girls
	math	45%	40%
	reading	01%	22%
	language arts	07%	14%
	science	31%	18%
	social studies	15%	04%
When it comes to attending school in general, my child's attitude is...		Boys	Girls
	positive	89%	90%
	negative	04%	05%
	indifferent	06%	04%

* Some survey questions were not answered by participants resulting in a total response rate of less than 100%.

Table 4
Parent Ratings of Children's Reading Scores

	Boys	Girls
A (100-92)	52%	54%
B (91-83)	29%	37%
C (82-74)	15%	7%
D (73-64)	3%	2%

Conclusions

This study examined parent perceptions of children's reading abilities. The hypothesis of the study was only partially supported. The design of the study also provided information of common perceptions between parents and teachers regarding student achievement. Terra Nova scores match teacher's scores 36% of the time in regards to performance. These two variables differ in several ways. Standardized tests are administered over a period of a few days whereas teacher's scores are obtained over a period of weeks. Classroom material is taught and assessed in units allowing students to focus on smaller portions of information based on one subject at a time. Standardized testing assesses a culmination of information pertaining to several subjects. These differences in testing procedures derive different results. The results of the study suggested that alternatives in assessing student progress are needed to give a more accurate depiction of student ability. The vast differences in the methods used for testing students makes it difficult to determine reading performance.

Parental grading and teacher grading resulted in a significantly high correlation of .95 showing that 90.45% of the time, parents and teachers score students similarly. Results of this analysis may have been influenced by two important factors. Student grades are communicated to parents through graded papers that are sent home. In addition, first marking period report cards had previously been distributed and student progress had been discussed during parent/teacher conferences. This information provides a great deal of information to allow parents to accurately determine their child's reading scores.

Survey questions were explored to provide additional information to the study in regards to reading involvement at home and student attitudes towards school. Although each parent was given their own survey to complete, the results came back almost identical indicating that parents had completed the questionnaires together. Much

information was lost and as a result, an analysis of gender differences in the perceptions of parents could no longer be studied. Previous studies (Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski & Skovera, 1996) have indicated that fathers are more likely to read newspapers at home and boys perform better in math than girls. This study, according to parents' perceptions, finds those claims to go unsupported. Survey results did, however, show a great difference in terms of parents' perceptions of reading as a favorite subject for boys and girls. Parents of girls chose reading as their daughter's favorite subject 22% of the time, while parents of boys perceive their sons to prefer reading only 1% of the time. These results indicate that reading programs should be explored, specifically reading material, to identify features that may provide male students with a greater incentive to take an interest in reading. Time spent reading with boys at home in comparison with time spent reading with girls at home should also be explored to identify any inconsistencies along gender lines.

The differences in overall ratings of parents in terms of scores for sons and daughters are only slight. However, the minimal difference shows up with 8% of boys falling into the "C" category. Parent's perceptions in this study have proven to be a reliable predictor of their children's grades. The gender differences manifest themselves in the "B" and "C" categories. 37% of the parents of girls and 29% of the parents of boys rated them as "B" students. The 8% difference is shown in the percentage of "C" ratings for boys.

Therefore, parents of boys who are receiving C's in reading must be encouraged to help them find enjoyment in reading and feel as though they can achieve higher grades. By encouraging boys to read items of interest in their lives and take an overall interest, they can raise their achievement levels. Further studies should be conducted to identify factors that increase performance of boys in reading.

Social/Cultural Influences on Reading: Related Research

American children show a difference in their reading achievement along gender lines. The reading performance of females significantly surpasses that of males. Theories on the basis of such a discrepancy have been a concern of educators for decades. The perception of reading as a predominately female activity in American culture has led to a disproportionate number of females excelling in reading, as compared to males, in the United States.

In the United States

Research of social-cultural influences on reading achievement was conducted by Mazurkiewicz (1960) to explore the reasons for such a difference in reading ability along gender lines. The investigator sought to test the hypothesis that men view reading as a feminine activity. The investigation included eleventh grade males to determine if the level of reading achievement might be related to attitudes developed by social or cultural environments. Subjects were asked to respond to a M-F Attitude Activity Inventory by classifying various activities as feminine or masculine. Reading was placed amongst a variety of activities such as sewing, mountain climbing, hiking, and swimming. Results of this portion of the study found reading to be classified as "Mostly Feminine". The study proceeded to investigate the source of such an apparent perception of reading as a feminine activity by studying the attitude that fathers held towards reading. Information was obtained regarding similarities and differences between the attitudes of fathers and sons towards reading, the relationship between the son's attitude and his reading achievement, the relationship between the son's attitude and curriculum choice and the connection between the attitudes of fathers and sons in relation to their choice of academic or vocational curriculum.

The results from the latter portion of the study report that more sons than fathers perceive reading as a feminine activity, although the majority of sons and fathers classify reading as a mostly feminine activity. Furthermore, almost ten percent of the son's

attitude may be a result of the attitude the father holds. The findings indicate that a boy's attitude toward reading has a slight relationship with his reading ability. It is noted that 2 to 5% of a boy's reading achievement on standardized tests may be based on the attitude he holds towards the activity. The father's attitude is said to contribute only 7% towards an academically inclined student's attitude, yet it impacts 21% on the attitude of a vocational student. Consequently, the evidence provided by this study supports the hypothesis that some social-cultural factors influence achievement in reading.

Balow (1963) hypothesized that differences in reading achievement in the first grade are the result of greater educational readiness of girls and when readiness is held constant, sex differences in reading achievement do not exist. Thirteen first grade classrooms from a middle class suburb of St. Paul Minnesota participated in the study. The Gates Reading Readiness Tests were administered during the second and third weeks of school. The tests measured the knowledge the child must have to succeed in first grade reading, but did not measure motor skills or other areas of physiological maturation. In December the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test was administered followed by the Gates Primary Reading Test to measure reading achievement. Evidence from this study found significant differences between the sexes in reading achievement and non-significant differences in IQ. The differences between the sexes in readiness test scores contributes to the belief that girls come to school better prepared for formal reading instruction than boys. Results of the Gates Reading Readiness Test concluded that differences in readiness explain the significantly higher reading achievement of girls in first grade. When reading readiness was held constant, the differences in achievement between the sexes were too small to be significant. This study would support children being admitted to the first grade based on reading readiness rather than based on different ages of entrance for boys and girls.

Jenkinson Slobodian (1967) examined the behaviors of teachers toward first grade

children in reading instruction. Slobodian's study hypothesized that female first grade teachers discriminate against boys during reading instruction and actually behave differently toward the children based on sex differences. Previously recognized factors such as girls gaining in reading achievement over boys during early instruction (Gates, 1961; Stoud and Lindquist, 1942) in relation to such factors as growth and maturation to explain his/her achievement (Chronister, 1964; Clark, 1959; Kowitz, 1964; and Nicholson, 1957) and features of ones general culture, expectations, and attitudes (Dechant, 1964; Gates, 1961, Mazurkiewicz, 1960; and Preston 1962) were established.

The study consisted of ten first-grade teachers and their students from a public school in Detroit, Michigan. All classes were heterogeneously grouped and followed the districts basal reading series. Data regarding pupil perceptions of their interactions with their teacher were gathered through the use of surveys. Students were asked to respond to, "To whom is the teacher talking when she says: 1) Read that page out loud for us? 2) Sit up and pay attention? 3) You did a fine job reading? 4) Who doesn't get to read very much in your group? 5) Who doesn't read well?, and 6) Who is the best reader in your group?" Next, teachers were asked to rate each pupil according to his motivation and readiness for reading using a graphic rating scale (Guilford, 1954).

Results of this study found that pupils perceived that boys received more negative comments from the teacher. Boys were also perceived as being poor readers. No significant sex differences were noted in any other area of the pupil's survey. Boys were found to choose other boys and girls chose other girls when asked to identify who was most often given the chance to read, who was complimented after reading, and who read the best. Boys were chosen significantly more by both boys and girls on the item pertaining to negative comments from the teacher. Items regarding who did not read well and who did not read much were not sex-linked. Teachers identified more boys as "less motivated and ready" than girls, yet teachers did not identify a disproportionate number

of boys in the class. An insignificant difference was noted between the number of times boys and girls were called on to respond by their teachers. In addition, teachers did not react differentially to boys' and girls' responses. Boys interrupted reading lessons far more than girls, but teachers did not react differentially based on gender. Teachers were "accepting" or "rejective" of interruptions regardless as to whether they came from boys or girls. Comparisons made of reading achievement between boys and girls were not significantly different; boys $m = 92.74$, $SD = 30.48$ and girls $m = 93.86$, $SD = 26.99$).

In this study, Slobodian found that the evidence did not support the hypothesis that female first grade teachers favor girls over boys in reading instruction. It was suggested that an explanation of boys' lower reading achievement could better be studied by focusing on specific teacher-pupil interactions taking place during classroom instruction. Teachers were not found to call on girls more and boys less, or to be more negative to boys than to girls during reading. Teachers were observed giving equal opportunities to participate during reading. The study concluded that teachers worked at teaching pupils to read with consideration as to the student's gender.

The influence teachers have on reading ability was further explored as Shapiro (1980) studied the effects of teachers' gender on primary children's attitudes toward reading. The Survey of School Attitudes was administered to 141 children; second grade boys and girls from male and female teacher classrooms. Shapiro based his study on previous research indicating that male and female teachers have differing expectations for boys and girls (Palardy, 1969) and differing expectations create differences in performance (McNeil, 1964; Shinedling and Pedersen, 1970). Sexton (1969) indicated a negative effect on boys' reading behavior due to female teachers' expectations. Furthermore, men and boys are found to view reading as a feminine activity which influences a boy's reading ability (Mazurkiewicz, 1960; Kagan, 1964). It is thought that the lack of an appropriate sex-role model for early reading may impact on the poor

achievement and attitude of boys (Gentile and McMillan, 1976). In this study, Shapiro investigated the reading attitudes of children taught by male and female teachers. The results revealed that girls held a more positive attitude towards reading. This finding supports previous studies, yet note is taken of the fact that the study took place in second grade following the child's first grade experience with female teachers. An important conclusion in this study was that the subjects in male-teacher classrooms had significantly better attitudes toward reading than the subjects taught by females. For boys, this fact supports the hypothesis that male teachers demonstrate that it is acceptable for boys to enjoy reading. However, the study also mentions that girls taught by men had significantly higher scores than those taught by women. It is speculated that the novelty of having a male teacher may explain the increased interest in reading. The study indicates that male primary teachers may have a positive effect on the attitudes of children during reading.

Research conducted by Bank, Biddle, and Good (1980) explored several hypotheses regarding the sex differences in reading achievement. Several explanations were investigated including physical maturation, female teacher bias, teacher discrimination, feminization of reading, differential response to pupil behaviors, and sex-relevant teaching styles. Expectations about gender roles and the evaluations of male and female performance are often more diversified than the observed behaviors and accomplishments of the two sexes (Goldberg, 1968; Pheterson, Kiesler, and Goldberg, 1971). The first hypothesis exploring physical maturation goes unsupported as a result of cross-cultural data. For example, Preston (1962) reported that boys showed higher reading achievement in Germany and had fewer reading problems. Kagan (1969) reported no differences in reading in the early grades in Japan. Johnson (1973) compared four countries and found boys to have higher reading achievement in England and Nigeria.

The hypothesis that female teachers have a bias towards promoting reading in girls was first noted by Ayers in 1909. The evidence to support this theory is weak and contradictory when taking into account all available research. It was suggested that additional studies focus on teacher expectations and behaviors based on teacher and student gender. The theory of teacher discrimination provides evidence that boys have more difficulty being good pupils than girls in the eyes of their teachers. As a result, boys are more likely to develop negative attitudes toward school. (Berk, Rose, & Stewart, 1970). The difficulty in studying discrimination lies within the difficulty to decipher the data as discriminating or if the teacher was trying to cope with the behavior of boys.

Similar to the discrimination hypothesis, the feminization hypothesis examined effects of teacher expectations and behaviors on achievement levels of boys and girls. However, the feminization hypothesis is based on the idea that their own expectations and interests in addition to the actions of teachers may affect pupil behaviors. Data suggests that boys and girls perform better on curriculum problems that are related to sex role interests and are less successful with those that are at odds with sex role interests (Christoplos and Borden, 1978). The available information holds the feminization of reading hypothesis to be a possible route to understanding differential reading achievement.

The hypothesis that differential responses to pupil behaviors exist suggests that teachers notice and respond to different behaviors and interests of pupils rather than to their sex or other characteristics. Since studies of teachers' beliefs and studies of the classroom behaviors of students have often been approached separately, it is not yet possible to determine the extent to which teacher beliefs reflect student differences in the classroom. Evidence does indicate that teachers behave differently toward students from different racial and ethnic groups (Brophy, Good, 1974; Jackson and Cosca, 1974; Rist, 1970) as well as differential treatment of boys and girls. It is not possible to tell if

teachers are discriminating against boys (or girls) or whether they are responding to different behaviors or the two sexes. Although the hypothesis cannot be said to be proved by the available data, it does seem more able than previous hypotheses to explain the varying reading achievement not only across sexes, but also within sexes.

The hypothesis that teachers hold different values of instruction that produce differing teaching styles better serving the needs of some pupils more than others was investigated. The hypothesis proposed that American teaching styles serve girls more effectively than boys. Bennett (1976) investigated the effects of "formal" and "informal" styles of instruction and found that sex interacted with other pupil characteristics to determine responses to these different styles. High-ability boys and girls did similar work in formal classrooms, low achieving boys did substantially worse in formal classrooms than did low-ability girls. The present study found a need for additional research in regards to several hypotheses. More classroom research is needed to understand the reasons for American society producing girls that have more verbal skills than boys do.

Steiner (1981) investigated sex differences in reading achievement and the sex typing of reading. The researcher examined three areas related to sex differences in reading achievement; the relationship between sex-typed perceptions of reading and reading achievement, grade level and sex-typed perceptions of reading, and sex-typed perceptions of reading and the independent variables of reading achievement, IQ, age, grade level, reading attitude, and socio-economic level.

Steiner set out to reveal the basis for the change in perception of reading that occurs between grades one and four. Two instruments were given to all students participating in the study to measure their sex-typed perceptions of reading and reading attitude. The instruments used were the Downing Object-Activity Opinion Survey and the Estes Reading Attitude Scale. Students' IQ and reading achievement were measured through use of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The first hypothesis examining sex

differences in reading achievement found the girls insignificantly out performed the boys in only grades 2 and 3. At grades 1 and 4, the boys outscored the girls, but at insignificant probability levels. The researcher found these results to be unique to American achievement patterns found 10 to 20 years earlier, but could provide evidence of a new trend developing.

The significance of sex typed perceptions of reading and reading achievement showed that sex-typed perceptions of reading did not account for a significant amount of unique variance in predicting reading achievement. The majority of boys and girls had sex-appropriate perceptions of reading (the perception that boys and girls can both do well in reading) and reading achievement scores at or above grade level. The hypothesis concerned with the sex-typing of reading as a feminine activity found by use of a chi-square analyses that reading was not sex-typed as a feminine activity. Reading was perceived as appropriate for both sexes.

The next hypothesis explored the likelihood of a perception-changing trend between grades one and four. There was a small movement from sex-appropriate to sex inappropriate perceptions of reading for both sexes. The study concluded that there was no significant trend for either boys' or girls' perceptions of reading to change from sex appropriate to sex inappropriate between grades one and four.

Lastly, a hypothesis regarding reading attitude with the influence of gender remaining controlled, was found to be a significant discriminator of reading perceptions. Positive correlations were noted between positive reading attitude and sex appropriate perceptions and between negative reading attitude and sex-inappropriate perceptions. The present study explored several aspects of sex differences in reading achievement and the sex-typing of reading, yet was unable to provide conclusive information to support the hypotheses. The findings could however provide classroom teachers with information to incorporate a wider range of materials for high-interest learning for boys and girls.

Swanson (1982) conducted a study to provide additional information regarding first graders' attitudes toward reading and to determine if after four months of reading instruction, sex and socioeconomic status differentiate reading attitudes. This study made use of the random method of selection by choosing two samples from an urban population and one from a rural population. The study concluded that with limited reading instruction, first graders have differentiated attitudes toward reading, and social class appears to differentially affect first grade male and female reading attitude scores with a greater impact at the lower end of the social scale. Although sex and socioeconomic status influences reading attitude scores, the low degree of effect suggests the need to explore other factors. Consequently, sex and socioeconomic status have only a slight to moderate influence on reading attitudes.

Hoge and Butcher (1984) analyzed the ability of teachers to accurately judge the reading achievement of students in regards to test performance, basic intellectual ability, and motivation. Students were administered standardized reading achievement and IQ tests. The researchers set out to determine how accurately teachers judge student achievement and the extent to which pupil gender and ability become biasing factors in the judgments. Teachers were able to judge achievement with remarkable accuracy. However, some teachers were biased in their judgments by pupil ability. They overestimated their performance of high ability pupils and underestimated the performance of low ability pupils. The study also concluded that teachers did not demonstrate gender bias in their judgments.

Marsh, Smith, and Barnes (1985) conducted a study using 559 fifth graders to identify multiple dimensions of self-concept and academic achievements. Through their investigation it was discovered that academic achievement was significantly and positively correlated with academic self-concepts, but not with nonacademic facets of self-concept.

The study found girls to have higher levels of academic achievement in both reading and mathematics. However, girls were found to have higher levels of reading self-concept, but lower levels of math self-concept. The researchers interpreted their findings to mean that socialization produces self-concept differences that produce achievement differences. Therefore, a student whose academic abilities are low in both math and reading, but whose ability in math is better than in reading, may have an average self-concept in mathematics (Marsh et al, 1985). The researchers found that high self-concept in reading is more likely when reading achievement is high and when reading achievement is higher than math achievement.

The impact of reading content on students' perceptions of the masculinity or femininity of reading was examined (Kelly, 1986). The investigation included 255 females and 237 males from two different suburban school districts. All participants were in kindergarten, grades 2,4,6, 8 or high school. To identify reading activities as masculine or feminine, students were shown 60 slides of children doing a variety of activities including: reading a book, a TV Guide, a mystery book, the newspaper comics, a science book, a dictionary, an animal book, a running book, and a poetry book. Students were asked to identify each activity as male or female by circling "boy" or "girl" on their answer sheets. Depending on the sex and grade level of the students, some reading items were viewed as masculine, some as feminine, and one as equally masculine and feminine. According to Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), the development of sex role standards depends on three learning processes; (1) direct parental reinforcement of behavior by boys and girls, (2) identification with the same-sex parent and other same-sex models by the child, and (3) a cognitive -developmentalist view proposed by Kolberg (1966) that states that children slowly develop masculine and feminine concepts and behave accordingly. In general, it was noted that males will avoid "female tasks", but females remain more sex-neutral.

The results of the study found five content areas received more responses of "boy": reading an animal book (66%), a science book (75%), a mystery book (67%), a TV Guide (64%), and newspaper comics (71%). Two content areas received more "girl" responses: reading a poetry book (88%) and a dictionary (64%). Reading a running book received almost an equal number of "boy" (51%) and "girl" (49%) responses.

Item responses of kindergarten students showed an equal amount of "girl" and "boy" responses. The differences in the responses became evident in second grade, although the pattern did not necessarily increase with grade level. Reading in general was designated as a feminine activity although, as mentioned, the content areas remained a determining factor as to whether the reading was perceived as masculine or feminine.

The investigation noted three findings. First, when students begin school, their attitudes towards reading are not stereotyped as male or female. Next, by second grade, boys' and girls' attitudes toward reading begin to change. Students begin to see reading in its entirety as a feminine activity. Last, the content or genre of the reading material made a difference in whether reading was perceived as a masculine or feminine activity.

Parker and Paradis (1986) explored the following questions in their study: (1) Do attitudes change as children progress from grade one through grade three and from grade four through grade six? (2) Do attitudes differ between boys and girls in the primary grades or boys and girls in the intermediate grades? (3) Do sex by grade interactions occur for reading attitudes in the primary or intermediate grades? The researchers used grade appropriate forms of the Heathington Scale following a preliminary interview to assess reading attitudes.

Results showed no significant difference in grades one, two, and three. A significant difference was observed for attitude scores in grades four, five, and six. Further analysis found the significant difference to occur between the grades of four and five. Grades one to three showed a positive attitude toward reading. The significant

increase in reading attitude scores from grades four to five were further researched using an item analysis of library reading, recreational reading, and general reading. Results indicated an increase in interest regarding non-classroom reading. This study conflicts with that of Neale and Proshek (1967) whom reported negative attitudes increasing from grades four to six. Parker and Paradis interpret the differences to be based on the content of the reading. Although negative attitudes may increase toward classroom reading, attitudes toward non-classroom reading become more positive.

Pip Osmont (1987) conducted a study to identify factors that impacted on reading interest and ability for boys and girls. Osmont discovered all female teachers reported more girls than boys as their most successful readers, even when more boys were included in the group. The male teacher, however, found more boys than girls to be the higher achievers for reading. Both female and male teachers expressed concern about the reading progress of boys more than that of girls. Varied interest levels were apparent by gender, as boys tended to be disruptive and restless, while girls were more attentive. In addition, boys were interested in superhero books, comics, space fiction, pop-up books, cartoon books, funny books, and "exciting colorful books". Girls selected fairy stories and story books, choices that were located in the classroom. When asked what adults were more likely to read at home, it was noted that a majority of mothers were seen reading fiction, while fathers read newspapers, information books, and documents from work. Osmont maintained that the information children gained about adults as readers impacted on their learning about gender roles.

Oakland and Stern (1989) conducted a study focusing on the variables associated with reading and math achievement. The intent was to identify if over- and underachievers possess characteristics that distinguish each from the other and from normal achievers. The study found no differences between three groups on any personal (gender, race, and birth order) and family (IQ, grade, SES, size, and intactness) variables.

Two differences were discovered regarding reading. Underachievement in reading was more prevalent among middle socioeconomic status blacks and less prevalent among lower SES blacks. Also, both under- and overachievers tended to be among later born children than normal achievers. The study did not find underachievement to be strongly linked to gender. Normal reading achievers were more likely to be among the earlier born children. These findings were identified only in reading achievement, and did not hold true for math achievement.

The stability of reading attitude from early childhood to the middle-adult years was examined (M. Cecil Smith, 1990). A longitudinal study was conducted with information gathered for forty years to research the development of reading attitudes from childhood into the adult years. Results indicated little change in reading attitude occurred throughout the school years. Furthermore, the study found that adults with the most education had the most positive reading attitudes. Participants with higher status jobs had more positive attitudes about reading. It was noted however, that individuals with more education often have jobs that require them to do more reading. The researcher concluded that reading attitude is a stable construct over time, although early childhood measures of reading attitude are poor predictors of adult attitude. Positive attitudes that are fostered during the later school years will remain positive in adulthood.

Out of the United States

The discrepancy between reading achievement levels for girls and boys does not necessarily hold true when researching information pertaining to cross-cultural studies. To explore sex differences in reading achievement in Germany as compared to that of the United States, a study by Preston (1962) was conducted. The participants were fourth and sixth grade students from Wiesbaden, Germany and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Comprehension tests were administered with results showing that American girls demonstrated a higher achievement level in both grades and on all tests than American

boys. However, the opposite was found to be true in Germany as German boys demonstrated greater reading achievement as compared to German girls. This finding shows that females do not instinctively excel in reading and that sex differences are not only found in the United States. It was noted that the majority of teachers in Germany, including in the elementary school, were male. The study contrasts that of Smith and Carrigan (1959) which implied that differences in reading abilities are physiological in nature. This research was further supported by Thorndike (1973) in a study of reading comprehension in fifteen countries that reported differences in trends for male and females reading achievement from country to country.

Preston and Johnson's findings were noted in Klein's (1977) pooling of research on cross-cultural studies. Preston and Johnson maintained that culture is a major component in sex differences in reading, yet was not supported by all of Klein's research. Malmquist (1960) reported that although Swedish females are more skillful at reading than boys, as is the case in Denmark, boys are the higher achievers in Finland (Thorndike, 1973). Bardwick (1971) and Engel (1976) maintain that biology and culture are responsible for the reading achievement of boys and girls.

Downing and Thomson's research (1977) opposed the belief that differences in reading achievement are due to physiological components. Any support for biological differences is weakened when taking into account the findings of Preston (1962) of German boys whom excelled in reading, Abiri's (1969) findings of Nigerian boys showing higher achievement than girls, and Oommen's (1973) conclusion that males have higher literacy rates than females in India. Johnson's study (1973) also weakened the biological theory as it was noted that females were dominant readers in Canada and in the United States, but males excelled in reading in England and Nigeria.

Downing and Thomson's study focused on students' perceptions of activities as being more appropriate for females or males in a North American community. A picture

test was devised including twelve illustrations of children drawn as "stick figures" engaged in a variety of activities. The pictures were intended to be objective in appearance so that the participants in the study would have to identify each pictured activity as more appropriate for a male or female. The researchers were primarily interested in a picture of a child reading a book. Participants were permitted to respond to each picture with "boy" or "girl". The study was conducted with three different groups: university students, children in grades 1,4,8 and 12 and a random sample of adults. The results of the study indicated a significant increase in "girl" responses in each grade except for first grade, in regards to the picture of the reading activity. The study suggested that North Americans perceive reading as more appropriate for females than males. The incongruency of the first grade results deemed it necessary to further explore the study of cultural expectations and perceptions of reading before reaching a valid conclusion.

Gross (1978) chose to explore school structure as it impacts on reading achievement of children. An Israeli kibbutz was selected for the study due to the cultural and educational differences that were hypothesized to greatly influence the performance of students. All individuals are considered to be equal as workers and the educational system promotes tutoring, provides necessary differentiated instruction, and teaches without the use of grades or tests. The Ortur's Hebrew Reading Comprehension Test was administered to students in second and fifth grade. Results indicated that boys and girls performed with no significant difference in reading achievement. Furthermore, males and females were found to be equally learning disabled. This study indicates the impact of societal stereotypes and their affect on academic achievement.

Sheridan (1981) examined the sociological impact of Japanese parents on their child's reading ability to produce a literacy rate superior to most. The Japanese prioritize reading in their homes by selecting books each week to read to family members and also

set aside twenty minutes a day for each child to read to the mother. As a result of the importance placed on reading, Japanese children are ready to read by the time they are 4 1/2 years old. Japanese children rarely have reading problems, and do not show significant gender differences in reading achievement. Several components such as educational achievement of parents, socioeconomic status, and wealth of books in the home have been found to correlate with higher reading achievement (Ollila and Nurss, 1981). In a culture that places such great importance on reading, it is not surprising that Japanese children, both male and female, excel in reading.

The previous review of studies cover a broad range of theoretical frameworks for the differences in reading achievements based on gender differences. Vast differences are apparent in gender studies of reading abilities of children in the United States and abroad. This discrepancy indicates that gender differences in reading achievement are brought about by social-cultural factors rather than physiological reasons. Further research is needed to decipher distinguishable characteristics allowing one gender to excel beyond another.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Cover Letter

January 1999

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently working on my thesis to fulfill the requirements of a Master's Degree in Reading Specialization. In order to complete my study, I am in need of your assistance. I would appreciate it if you could complete the attached questionnaire and return it to school with your child in the enclosed envelope. A questionnaire has been provided for both parents of each student. Please be assured that all information will be held in strict confidence. This study is in no way affiliated with the South Plainfield School District or Board of Education, it is merely a research project required by Kean University. A summary of questionnaire results will be made available to you upon completion of the study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the questionnaire, please feel free to contact me at Roosevelt School. I would like to thank you, in advance, for your help.

Sincerely,

Deborah Gianatasio
Fourth Grade Teacher

Appendix B

Parent/Guardian Questionnaire

The following questions should be answered in regards to your child enrolled in fourth grade. Questionnaire results can only be as accurate as the information provided. Please answer each question as accurately as possible by placing an X in the appropriate space. You have the option to skip any question you do not wish to answer.

1. What reading material is your child most likely to see you read at home?

- ☐ newspapers
- ☐ magazines
- ☐ information books
- ☐ recreational books/novels
- ☐ other Please specify: _____

2. You are

- ☐ female
- ☐ male

3. Currently in fourth grade I have a

- ☐ son
- ☐ daughter

4. My child

- ☐ excels in math
- ☐ excels in reading
- ☐ excels in math and reading, but more so in math
- ☐ excels in math and reading, but more so in reading
- ☐ my child is performing satisfactorily in math and reading
- ☐ has difficulty in math
- ☐ has difficulty in reading

5. My child is most likely to spend time at home reading

- ☐ newspapers
- ☐ magazines
- ☐ recreational books
- ☐ school texts
- ☐ other Please specify: _____

6. My child's math scores are usually

- ☐ A (92-100)
- ☐ B (83-91)
- ☐ C (74-82)
- ☐ D (64-73)

7. My child's reading scores are usually

- ☐ A (92-100)
- ☐ B (83-91)
- ☐ C (74-82)
- ☐ D (64-73)

8. I would like to see my child

- ☐ improve in math
- ☐ improve in reading
- ☐ improve in both reading and math
- ☐ remain at his/her level of achievement in reading and math

9. When I was in fourth grade my math scores were usually

- ☐ above average
- ☐ average
- ☐ below average
- ☐ do not recall

10. When I was in fourth grade my reading scores were usually

- ☐ above average
- ☐ average
- ☐ below average
- ☐ do not recall

11. My child has attended school

- ☐ in the United States only
- ☐ outside of the United States for a period of time

12. My child's favorite subject is

- ☐ math
- ☐ reading
- ☐ language arts
- ☐ science
- ☐ social studies

13. When it comes to attending school in general, my child's attitude is

- ☐ positive
- ☐ negative
- ☐ indifferent

14. Each night my child does homework for approximately

- ☐ 15 minutes
- ☐ 30 minutes
- ☐ 45 minutes
- ☐ 1 hour
- ☐ more than 1 hour

15. My child currently

- ☐ has a South Plainfield Library card
- ☐ does not have a South Plainfield Library card